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Psychology Division

Divisional Memorandum No. 10

STATEMENT OF THE MORALE OF THE FRENCH PEOPLE

(AUGUST THROUGH DECEMBER, 1941)

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SUMMARY

The division of France into Occupied and Unoccupied zones has effectively minimized the posibility of French unity. The individual Frenchman is as divided in his own thinking and effort as is the country itself. The shock of the fall of France resulted in depression, cynicism, pessimism. Toward the United States there are friendly feelings tinged with disappointment; with respect to the British, the French are suspicious and dissatisfied. The de Gaulle movement is looked upon with distrust except as it is confined to military operations. Certain underground activities, including religious youth movements and several publications of the clandestine press, appear to be gaining headway. The French are united in their desire to see the Colonial Empire remain intact and in the hope that the fleet will remain under the French flag.

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I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION BIASED

In the interests of brevity we have, throughout this report, used generic terms in referring to the people of France. That the attitudes we have described show some variation with social and economic status is undoubtedly the case. Attitudes favoring collaboration, for instance, seem to vary inversely with income and education (Catholic-conservative) level. But the division of France into Occupied and Unoccupied zones, the interference with the normal influences of education and religion, the forced migration of agricultural and industrial workers, and the disappearance of the traditional form of government and political organization make an analysis of French opinion along the lines of traditional social structure extremely difficult on a basis of our present information.

It is to be remembered also that the sources of information upon which our inferences regarding French morale are based are not representative in that they report conditions relating to only selected samples of the total population. Our belief is that the feelings of the large group of peasants and industrial workers are not adequately recorded in any of the material now available to COI. Our only bases for evaluating the attitudes of these lowest socio-economic levels are quite indirect. Such groups are rarely represented in interviews or intercepted letters. Consular observers no

longer function in most of France, and the opinions of Vichy concerning this portion of the population can scarcely be relied upon.

II. CONFUSION IN FRENCH ATTITUDES

Our sources of information reveal considerable confusion in the attitudes of Frenchmen. A major factor producing this confusion is the division of France into two zones. Whether by design, accident, or necessity, this division of France has favored the Axis cause. Another disturbing factor is the uncertainty of the roles of the United States and Great Britain. The net effect of these and other disturbing influences has been to produce a situation such that, instead of there being one focus of attention for the French people, one object of wrath or blame, there are several. Frenchmen can and do blame Great Britain, the United States, Germany, former and present leaders of their own government, and other Frenchmen. This dissipation of their energies has led to confusion in their thinking and has rendered ineffective most of their resistance to German demands. From the report that people in the Occupied zone are showing more active opposition to the German occupation than are their fellows in the Unoccupied zone, we may infer that if all of France had been occupied Germany would have encountered difficulties beyond those accruing from the mere difference in the area of occupation.

Not the least of the disturbing elements in the total picture is the treatment--imagined or real--of the French prisoners. Rumors about the treatment being received by the prisoners fly thick and

fast throughout both zones of France. Indeed, the Germans have capitalized on some of these rumors by veiled and open threats as to what would happen to the prisoners if their fellow Frenchman failed to heed their demands. Since many French families have sons or fathers interned in German prison camps, these threats can be of a personal nature. The rumor has been confirmed that this is one method of turning Frenchman against Frenchman; a wife or mother or daughter is promised the safe return of the husband, son or father if she will turn informer on the activities of her neighbors.

III. SOME BASES OF STABILITY IN FRENCH ATTITUDES

Marshall Petain. In spite of the evident squandering of effort which the French people are now suffering, our information reveals two or three psychologically unifying forces at work. First and foremost among these stabilizing forces is a widely held attitude toward Marshall Petain. So powerful is this influence that it has been recognized to be an "untouchable" in the propaganda of Radio-Paris and other Axis-controlled broadcasters. The French are free to criticize other government officials and will listen to criticism of them by others, but faith in Petain appears to be relatively unshaken. There are many expressions of a feeling that Petain is not entirely responsible for his own actions; that he is under grave pressure from Nazi leaders; that he is doing the best he can do under the circumstances. While it would be going too far to say that many of Petain's pre-war statements and actions have been forgiven or forgotten, it is nevertheless true that to many Frenchmen he stands today as a symbol of a united France. Perhaps this

attitude should be expressed negatively in the feeling that Petain is less of a threat to the future of France than are many of the government officials who surround him.

Nationalism. A second influence giving continuity to French feeling is evidenced by the recurrent expression (in letters and interviews) of the traditional nationalism, to think of France first as France, and only secondarily of France as an ally of any other nation or as a collaborator or as a partner in any cooperative effort. The fate of France at the hands of Germany in this war has not perceptibly shaken the fundamental faith of the Frenchman in the ultimate destiny of his nation as a world power.

Religion. According to one report which has substantiation in the observation of some journalists, the attitude toward the clergy, the increase in church attendance, and the theme of unification and sacrifice which is now emanating from the Vatican furnish the opportunity for an accordance of action which has possibilities for the future. Even though the increase in religious observance may be the normal recourse of a people during times of stress, it may be useful from the standpoint of producing a unanimity of opinion and a common base for action. The Roman Catholic Church has in the past been one of the important sources of support for the Vichy regime. Today, however, it gives promise of aiding in rallying the people of France against the government and its policy of collaboration. Darlan, in a recent speech before leaders of the government-inspired youth groups, attacked the clergy and leaders of the religious youth movements and expressed anxiety over the Catholic attitude toward his policy of collaboration. This undoubtedly contri-

buted materially toward widening the already apparent breach between the Roman Catholic Church and the Vichy regime. It seems also to have stimulated increased anticollaboration activity in the Catholic youth movement.

IV. ATTITUDES TOWARD GERMANY

Hatred of Germany. Still another unifying force derives from the almost unanimous hatred of the Germans. In view of the fact that since 1870 France has experienced three invasions by Germany, together with the destruction and confiscation of life and property which have accompanied them, few families have escaped the loss of life of a relative who has participated in armed resistance to this German aggression. Upon such an experience is founded a deep-seated hatred of almost everything connected with Germany. That this fundamental antagonism is not always openly avowed is not due to a reluctance to express it but, rather, to a complex of factors among which is the fact of German domination. Indeed, competent observers are inclined to attribute the few evidences in the Occupied zone of a willingness to "collaborate" to the requirements of absolute necessity and to disillusionment and resignation rather than to a weakening of the traditional resistance of the French toward the Germans. The slight support received by collaborationist movement in Occupied France is accompanied by a relatively more intense feeling against the Germans.

Collaboration. In Unoccupied France, on the other hand, collaboration receives more voluntary backing, and the bitterness against the Germans is not as keen. Realism requires some accept-

ance of the principle of collaboration, but there seems to be almost no evidence, except among a few government officials and a few industrialists in the heavy industries, of a desire to see Germany win the war and continue the present domination of the French government. Some of those who favor collaboration give as their reason that such a policy is the only way France can be rescued from the depths to which the nation has sunk; that the only hope for France is to take part in the Nazi New Order for Europe. We believe that the reason for the slightly greater popularity of collaboration in Unoccupied France is the absence of the Occupation forces in this zone. Coincident with this absence there is the lack of the necessity for living continually under surveillance; abuse by foreign bureaucratic annoyances is missing; and the people do not see the country being drained of its natural resources and manufactured goods. Those citizens who do favor collaboration (a few industrialists, political opportunists, reactionary clergy, rentiers) are apparently motivated by purely selfish, short-term considerations relating to the condition of their business, their real estate holdings or other investments and the anticipated effect of collaboration upon their security in these respects.

Occupation. Even the slight support which the collaborationist movement has received in France has suffered a serious setback as a result of the Russian successes, the entry of the United States into the war, and the reprisal-killings. Although many Frenchmen have been impatient with Vichy's lack of initiative with regard to the latter, most of them realize that the orders for the assassinations come directly from Berlin. Indeed, it is generally felt by Frenchmen that the German officers in charge of the Occupation

forces would have been somewhat more lenient. Frenchmen were deeply impressed by Petain's radio appeal, and for most of them his futile offer of himself as a hostage was a revelation of Vichy's impotence.

Axis Reverses. There are clear indications that the entry of the United States into the war and the German retreat in Russia have given new impetus to French resistance against the Germans. Petain's New Year speech, the assassination of Pucheu's assistant, the recent student rioting in the Paris section with its machine-gun suppression and subsequent five-o'clock curfew--all reflect this attitude. There appears also to be an increasingly active and extensively read clandestine press, comprising news organs of well-organized subversive groups.

V. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE UNITED STATES

United States War Effort. It is reported that there was some hope among the officials at Vichy that the United States would not enter the war. There is no evidence that this hope was shared by the people generally, and disappointment over the initial showing of the United States in the Pacific was not concealed. This feeling is, perhaps, more acute because, at the time of the "Indo-China incident," there was a widespread hope that the United States would take a more active part in helping the French to resist the Japanese demands. In certain government circles, this hope took the form of concrete statements of what the United States would do if the Japanese continued their stand. It is not difficult to imagine the effect of the absence of positive United States action upon the thinking of both government

officials and private citizens of France. At the present, it is too soon to know what the effect of continued Japanese successes would be upon French morale. It is safe to predict, however, that the elements favoring collaboration will use such events to strengthen their case. Politically, such developments may have considerable importance; psychologically, their effects may be somewhat obscure for the time being at least.

The trauma which the overwhelming power of the Nazi conquest produced and which was further enhanced by the complete collapse of the government of France and the interference with normal institutional functions still remains a powerful determiner of the everyday actions of the individual Frenchman. In such a state, it is only natural that he should look upon the efforts of the United States and of Great Britain with a great deal of cynicism and pessimism. Like many others, the Frenchman is susceptible to displays of power, strength, wealth. To date, he has not been particularly impressed by the Allied effort even though recent developments on the Eastern Front have been encouraging.

Vichy-United States Relations. A strong desire to see the relations between Vichy and the United States remain as cordial as possible is revealed. The dismissal of Weygand occasioned many evidences of concern on this point because it was evident to many Frenchmen that the United States was disturbed by it. The United States, throughout a long and friendly relation with France, has been a symbol of power, wealth, and solidarity which the Frenchman admires and which he would like his government to attain, even though his government's approach to this ideal has been unsatisfactory

in most respects.

VI. ATTITUDES TOWARD GREAT BRITAIN

Sources of Friction. Reports show that most of the Frenchman's disappointment regarding the progress of the anti-Nazi cause has been directed against Great Britain. There are frequent evidences of open criticism of the British war effort. In addition to the generalized feeling that Britain has failed France, that the British have always wanted others to fight their battles for them, there are the specific complaints relating to: the British attack on the French fleet at Oran; British failure to supply adequate aid to Russia; needless deaths of French civilians in R.A.F. bombings (although people of the Occupied zone do not object to the bombing of factories working on German contracts); distrust of British military competence. Judging from letters and interviews, this disaffection is fairly widespread. Nazi propaganda efforts have tried to capitalize on these points of friction between the two countries by repeated references to them in an attempt to drive a wedge between the two former allies.

Another cause of distrust which the British are careful to take into account and attempt to dispel in their propaganda efforts to France is the suspicion, which crops up frequently in letters and interviews, that Great Britain has designs on the French Colonial Empire. The same allaying of

suspicion was necessary following the British seizure of parts of the French merchant marine. Contrariwise, Nazi propaganda to France has attempted to nurse these suspicions into full-blown hatred. The amount of attention given to this point by both the British and the Axis propaganda efforts leads us to believe that it is a matter of real important concern to both sides.

Fear of British Domination. Hope that the Allies will win the war is tempered by a fear that such a victory may mean British domination in domestic and colonial affairs. It is the studied opinion of several observers that many Frenchmen are divided in their own thinking as to whether British or German domination would be the more undesirable. It is hard to say whether this is the result of intensive Axis propaganda or more subtle psychological processes. Unquestionably, such a state of mind is unfortunate from the standpoint of assistance to the British. With equal certainty, it points the way for Allied educational efforts and in itself constitutes a propaganda directive.

VII. ATTITUDES TOWARD RUSSIA

Russia Versus Communism. The attitude of the French people toward Russia is difficult to appraise. It is obscured, in the first place, by the German-controlled attitude of the Vichy government and its accompaniment of anti-Communist propaganda; and, in the second place, by the impossibility of divorcing Russia as one of the United Nations from Russia as the

source of Communist ideology and revolutionary activity. Moreover, our available sources of information tap principally those social groups above the middle class, and may therefore be expected to exhibit considerable bias. There are undoubtedly many people in France who fear Communism more than Nazism. From this group Russia, of course, wins no sympathy. They attribute the present activities of the Communists not to any devotion to France and her liberation, but rather to Moscow-dictated anti-Nazi policies. The assassinations of German military personnel, according to them, is directed at forcing the withdrawal of more troops from the Eastern Front to police France.

German Threat. There are others of the population who believe Germany the first and most formidable enemy of France, but who realize the high probability that a release from German domination may bring a Communist regime for France. These people are confused. They remember the volte face which the Communists were forced to execute when Germany invaded Russia. Events on the Eastern Front enthuse them, not as Russian successes, but only as German defeats.

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that Russia has been a traditional ally of France, and Communism has enjoyed considerable popularity among large segments of the French population. It seems highly probable that the great mass of the population has reacted favorably to the allignment of Russia with Britain and the United States and is eager to

see continued Soviet military successes. So far as both Britain and Russia are concerned, French attitude appears to vary with the military successes or failures of these Allies.

VIII. ATTITUDES IN DOMESTIC MATTERS

Self-blame and Confusion. As noted in the earlier paragraphs of this report, the frustration resulting from the conquest and division of France has done much, we believe, to divert the attention of the French from the real object of their wrath and indignation. In the confusion following this diversion there has been a tendency for feelings of self-guilt to be uncritically accepted as true guilt. The traumatic depression into which the Frenchman fell after the collapse of France encourages this inward direction of his thinking and the resulting self-blame. As a consequence, we find some Frenchmen inclined to blame themselves; some blame other Frenchmen; some hold the government responsible; and others blame the government's allies for permitting the Germans to create the superior war machine to which his country fell victim. This heterogeneity of the objects of French aggression has markedly lowered the effectiveness of the resentment which is nourished by the present state of affairs, and the dissipation of energy is actively encouraged by Axis propaganda.

Vichy Officialdom. There are reports that the people in occupied France feel that Vichy is not properly sympathetic regarding their status. Some of them believe that the relative security of those living in the Unoccupied zone has made

the latter negligent of the fate of their fellow citizens who must live every day under the watchful eye and interfering arm of the Occupation forces. The apparent indifference of the Vichy government and the people of Unoccupied France toward the reprisal-killings is a case in point and is a matter of serious concern to Petain, whose duty it is to keep the French united.

Free French Movement. The de Gaullist movement is not popular in either zone of France in the way that might be inferred from many of the accounts reaching this country. Most reports show that de Gaulle is regarded as the leader of a group that is still able to maintain active resistance against the aggressors. Many Frenchmen would and do welcome the opportunity to cast their lot with this group in an effort to take a more active part in the liberation of France. But it would be a mistake to consider de Gaulle as a popular political leader or his advisers as the desired nucleus of a new French government. Although de Gaulle has never made a claim to political leadership, some of his supporters have thrust this role upon him, and it is certain that his enemies frequently accuse him of such ambitions. This matter constitutes a very sensitive area in the pattern of French attitudes and must be taken into account in the foreign policy of any nation hoping to receive the wholehearted cooperation of the French. Radio-Paris never misses an opportunity to berate the Free French movement, taking

full advantage of such incidents as those in Syria and Dakar. The St. Pierre-Miquelon incident also gave the Axis opportunity to capitalize on a diversion of the loyalties of the French people.

Colonies and the Fleet. While there is division in many other matters, there is almost unanimity among the reports of opinion regarding the Colonies and the fleet. Observers report that one of the surest ways to alienate the French would be to give them the slightest suspicion that the Colonies are not secure. German propaganda has repeatedly attempted to drive a wedge between the French and the British on the issue of the Colonies, and is now engaged in the ticklish job of promoting the Nazi cause without arousing too much apprehension regarding German designs on the Colonial Empire. The same precarious situation exists in the case of the fleet, where the reported morale of the personnel --at least among the lower ranks-- is such that a mutiny might well be the result, if Germany were to overplay her hand. Fear of mutiny in the Navy and of rebellion on the Continent and in the Colonies seems to be enough to restrain German ambitions in these two directions. A mismove on either of these two issues might well bring a united France into being and it is just such an eventuality that all of the Nazi effort has so far been directed against. Here again we see evidence of the general Nazi tactic, that of effecting and maintaining a division within the enemy. The success of such

a strategy has been demonstrated time and again.

Third Republic. An important attitude relating to domestic matters is the profound disillusionment of many of the people with the French republican government. This attitude has been intensified recently by evidences of corruption, of the effectiveness of German agents in buying off or blackmailing government officials, and of military inefficiency. One derivative of this attitude is a fatalistic readiness in certain segments of the population to accept the fascistic youth movement, Jew-baiting, and the generally reactionary ideology of the Vichy regime. This resignation is a real obstacle to be overcome if the French people as a whole are to be brought into active opposition to Nazi policies. It is an attitude which deserves some attention because, unlike that of the German people toward the Weimar Republic, it need not necessarily lead inevitably to an acceptance of the Nazi principles. Present alternatives are almost equally unattractive. Even though there is a reported surge of interest in the monarchist movement, the French people still favor republican government, in spite of the fact that the attempt of the Third Republic and other previous efforts to establish such a government have been discredited.

Labor Charter. The reaction of the French laborer to the Labor Charter is not certain. In this matter we have only one source, which states that the Charter has been passively accepted by French labor, since it is believed by most to be a

temporary affair only for the duration, and to be replaced after the cessation of hostilities. Such a passive acceptance of the terms of the Charter would seem to be a legitimate inference to be made in the absence of evidence of active opposition to it. The Charter forbids strikes and lockouts in a manner which represents a complete reversal of the treatment to which the French laboring man has become accustomed. The terms of the Charter must have created intense resentment, although evidence of a widespread reaction has not appeared.

Food Shortages. An increasingly acute problem in large parts of France today is the food shortage. Just how great the shortage is may not be accurately determined. It varies in different areas. In general the situation is more acute in urban regions, but even that appears not to be a wholly accurate generalization. In some regions deprivation is unquestionably severe. The effect of this shortage upon the morale of the people cannot be evaluated of and by itself. Hunger does not necessarily bring lowered morale. Food deprivations, unless they are so severe that they actually fail to meet the minimum of a survival diet, may actually serve as a spur to action and increased effort. Rationing may even constitute a unifying theme. One intercept, for example, says, "the 'ravitaillement' is very bad--shows a despairing lack of understanding of our vital needs--but we endure these privations because we hope and will not show distress to the enemy."

The reactions of the people to the rationing and the

shortages are not clear. Certainly there is no unanimity of behavior. Much may be expected to depend upon where the people place responsibility for the shortages. Some blame the Nazis for robbing their country of its normal food supply, and hence are goaded to further resistance to German domination. This is perhaps most apparent in the Occupied zone where the people have more clearly seen the country being stripped. One comment, for instance, states that the number of arrests, seizures of hostages, and reprisal-killings in Paris seems to be directly related to the severity of the food situation there. Others of the population, particularly in the free zone, blame Vichy for mismanagement and weakness, and so are spurred to resist the government. There are some, to be sure, who attribute the food shortages to the British blockade and who are critical of the United States for not attempting to relieve the situation. Such opinions, however, seem to be relatively few. The more prevailing attitude would seem to be that which is represented in the statement of one interviewee to the effect that the "French gladly accept the blockade because the Germans get less."

SOURCES:

1. R. J. Moore, Division of Special Information, Western European Section.

2. Red Cross representative recently returned from France (interviewed by Marshall Dill, Division of Special Information, Central European Section).

3. Fifteen interviews relating to conditions in France, conducted by the Division of Oral Intelligence.

4. Fifty-one intercepts of letters describing conditions of some psychological pertinence in France from the British Censor at Bermuda (selected from approximately 150 intercepts).

5. Paraphrases of cables sent from Vichy to the State Department since August 2, 1941.

6. Medium-wave monitoring report, received through Mr. Barnes, covering broadcasts to the French people from Radio-Paris, Vichy-controlled radio, Rome, the Vatican, Luxembourg, for the period covered by the report.

7. Propaganda Directives and Guidances to BBC re: French broadcasts.

8. BBC Daily Digest of Foreign Broadcasts, parts I and II, for November, 1941.

9. FCC Reports and Analyses for October, November, and December, 1941.

10. Reports of foreign correspondents published in eight New York, Washington, and Chicago newspapers and furnished by the clipping bureau of the Division of Special Information.

11. Donovan and Mowror, "Fifth Column Lessons for America."

12. Approximately 125 miscellaneous accessions in the Central Information Division relating to psychological conditions in France.

13. Mr. Samuel Reber, Division of European Affairs, State Department.